
The American Theological Library Association

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FOR MANY YEARS THE LIBRARIANS of Protestant theological seminaries were without a special professional organization to promote discussion and greater competence and understanding of their work. Many seminary librarians in these years found help and fellowship in participating with the activities of the American Library Association, the various state library associations, and the Special Libraries Association. The Religious Books Round Table of the American Library Association offered opportunity for discussion of one subject of interest but, in the opinion of some, gave little opportunity for the introduction of specialized and technical topics.

Renewed interest in the problems of the support and service of seminary libraries was encouraged by the American Association of Theological Schools, which had been founded in 1918. In 1946 it voted to make a study in the years 1948 to 1950 of theological libraries and authorized its executive committee to call a conference on theological library work. The convening committee was composed of E. B. Hawk, A. F. Kuhlman, and L. R. Elliott to which were later added R. F. Beach, Sanford Fleming, K. S. Gapp, and Lucy W. Markley. The first conference met at Louisville Presbyterian Seminary, Louisville, Kentucky, on June 23 and 24, 1947. Several earlier and contemporary movements toward increased cooperation were gathered together in this one organization at the Louisville conference. The executive secretary of A.A.T.S. reported in 1948 that "the enterprise of the American Theological Library Association was not entirely originated" by the A.A.T.S. but that the A.A.T.S. "has been of help in the formation of this Association, from which we hope great good may come."¹⁻⁴

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organized the program. Much of the proceedings of the first conference was devoted to general surveys of seminary library work. The relation of the library to instruction, the policies of A.A.T.S. regarding the accreditation of seminaries, bibliographies, the indexing of religious periodicals, cataloging, classification, reference work, administration, the training of librarians, extension service, and other relevant topics. A constitution was proposed, and an agreement was reached to have annual conferences.

The support given by A.A.T.S. has been extremely influential in the success of the A.T.L.A., and the A.T.L.A. has endeavored to maintain close relationship to the parent organization. The first constitution (adopted in 1947-48) restricted active membership, voting privileges, and the right of holding office to librarians serving in theological seminaries, and made provision for other interested persons in a category of associate membership. In 1950-51 a proposal to abolish associate membership and to open active membership to all interested persons was disapproved, and the active membership was enlarged slightly by amending the qualification for active membership to read "Librarians serving in theological seminary libraries, denominational historical libraries, and other specialized religious libraries may become active members by vote of the executive committee. . . ." In 1957-58 a new constitution restricted full membership as follows: "Librarians serving, or retired from, the library staffs of institutions which are members of A.A.T.S. are eligible for full membership . . .," extended a vote to institutional members (always limited to libraries of schools that were either accredited or associate members of A.A.T.S.), permitted associate members to vote on matters not related to election of officers or constitution, and provided for a written ballot for elective offices. At this time the statement of purpose and relationship to other organizations was expanded to its present form as follows:

The purpose of this Association shall be to bring its members into closer working relations with each other and with the American Association of Theological Schools, to study the distinctive problems of the theological library, and to promote library service and librarianship among the institutions of AATS and theological education in general. The Association shall direct and carry on a program of activities to advance: (a) the standards of library service, in the broadest sense, in theological libraries, and (b) the continued professional and scholarly growth of those engaged in work in these libraries.

The American Theological Library Association is affiliated with the American Association of Theological Schools (AATS). This affiliation has been expressed by AATS in its original founding of ATLA, its continued interest in the support of the work of ATLA, its readiness to advise and consult with officials and committees of ATLA, its willingness to form joint committees where joint action is proper, to serve as agent for funds designated for ATLA purposes and administered by ATLA, and to receive communication from ATLA relative to libraries and theological education.

This affiliation has been expressed by ATLA by means of their interest and support of AATS objectives, and by their readiness to receive communication and counsel from AATS.⁵

The dangers of establishing a professional organization that involves more than incidental attention to religious congeniality are recognized by the members of the Association. The restriction of active membership to employees of institutions which are members of A.A.T.S. seems to be designed primarily to direct the central concern to library service that is adequate for theological instruction on the graduate level, and not to services which benefit religious instruction in other educational environments. The propriety of such an undertaking—which may be challenged from the point of view of some religious interests within the Association as well as from the point of view of other faiths or of professional interests—seems justified at the present time on the assumption that the Association will maintain adequate contacts with general library developments and will do more than offer to theological librarians a substitute for participation in other professional library organizations.

The A.T.L.A. maintains active affiliation with the American Library Association, the International Association of Theological Libraries, and more recently with the National Book Exchange. The programs of the organizations, as well as the activities of the Library of Congress, receive due attention at each conference.

The Association was able to be of some service to A.A.T.S. in the difficult matter of advising on standards for libraries in the accreditation policies of A.A.T.S. This task was undertaken by a joint committee appointed by A.A.T.S. in 1951-52 and again in 1958. Standards which were excellent in the statement of general theory but somewhat deficient in detail and in forcefulness were worked out, and were supplemented by "Check Sheets for Self Study and Evaluation of Seminary Libraries," "Selected Basic Reference Books," and "Check

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Lists of Selected Basic Periodicals," issued in 1958 by the A.A.T.S. under the title *Aids to a Theological School Library*, Revised Edition. Much more careful work, however, needs to be done in establishing and supporting higher standards.⁶

The conferences of the Association are held for two or three days annually and eagerly attended by from perhaps 75 to 125 librarians. A member theological seminary always serves as host for the convention and on alternate years, when A.A.T.S. holds its biennial conference, the effort is made to meet at the same time and place and to have one joint meeting with A.A.T.S. It has, however, never met at the same time and place as A.L.A. The program consists of the usual committee reports on the activities of the Association, speeches on virtually all important library topics, and addresses on relevant subjects in the fields of theological education, religious thought, biblical studies, and church history. Ways of cooperation between libraries are always discussed. Speakers from outside the membership of the Association are frequently invited; among such speakers, who have enhanced the conferences, may be mentioned A. F. Kuhlman, H. H. Fussler, A. S. Macdonald, D. E. Bean, Constance M. Winchell, Eugene Exman, George Piternick, J. P. Danton, Lester Capon, and D. K. Berninghausen.

Some of the papers in recent years have been bibliographic essays which cite in considerable detail the important works in religious fields, or offer compilations of titles otherwise unavailable elsewhere in print. The conference usually includes a publishers' religious book display and a book sale, both administered by A. R. Allenson, and tours of neighboring libraries and of the local sights. The *Summary of Proceedings* of the first thirteen conferences contains more than one thousand pages of useful material.⁷

The members of the Association participate in the work of the many committees with great enthusiasm. The Committee on Buildings and Equipment and the Committee on Cataloging and Classification give advice to individual members throughout the year, frequently plan special programs at conferences, keep the membership informed about relevant developments in general library work, and promote cooperation with regional and national programs. The Committee on Periodical Exchange devised a workable plan for exchanges,⁸ whereby many libraries were enabled to enlarge their periodical holdings. The difficulties involved in keeping card records of "wants" and "duplicates" up to date led in 1960 to a suspension of the plan in

favor of further experimentation with mimeographed exchange lists. There are also standing committees on membership, placement, the newsletter, the International Association of Theological Libraries, financial assistance from foundations, a new committee on denominational resources, and several special committees.

In addition to its *Summary of Proceedings*, the Association has issued *A Bibliography of Post-Graduate Masters' Theses in Religion*, edited by N. H. Sonne (1951), and an *Index of Religious Periodical Literature*, noted below. There is also a series entitled "Microcard Theological Studies" initiated by the Committee on Microphotography and issued by the Microcard Foundation. An excellent *Newsletter*, edited by D. M. Farris, has been distributed to all members since 1953. It contains news of the members and their libraries, bibliographical notes, reports on the policies and activities of the Association, and occasional articles; an index for the years 1953-54 to 1957-58 is printed after page 12 of Vol. 5, no. 3, for May 19, 1958.

The Association has been unusually successful in obtaining, with the assistance of the A.A.T.S., grants from foundations to promote special projects. At the present time three special programs are in operation, involving an expenditure of \$146,000.

The Board of Microtext, established by a grant of \$80,000 from the Sealantic Foundation, is designed to advance the interest of theological scholarship in any way in which microtext can be used. R. P. Morris is chairman of the Board, which to June 1960, has put in microfilm form more than one million pages of scholarly periodicals and other important sources. A definitive list of microtext materials relating to theology and religion is in process of compilation under the direction of the Board.⁹

The *Index to Religious Periodical Literature* began as a cooperative project in which perhaps twenty or thirty libraries submitted indexing copy to a general editor for final preparation for printing. The volumes covering the years 1949-52 and 1953-54 were edited, respectively, by J. S. Judah and Mrs. Pamela Quiers. In December 1956, a grant of \$30,000 was received from the Sealantic Foundation to support the project and a governing board was established. Lucy W. Markley was employed as editor, and an office was set up first in the library of Seabury-Western Theological Seminary and later in the Speer Library of Princeton Theological Seminary. Annual volumes for 1957 and 1958 were issued, and a three-year cumulation covering 1957-59 was pub-

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lished in 1960. Fifty-seven specialized journals in the sphere of religion and theology have been indexed in very scholarly fashion. Jannette E. Newhall and later Calvin Schmitt have been chairman of the Board.¹⁰

The program to improve the educational qualifications and status of librarians associated with institutions that are members of the A.A.T.S. and the A.T.L.A. was initiated in 1958 by a grant of \$9,000 from the Lilly Endowment, Inc. Modeled somewhat after the faculty fellowships offered by A.A.T.S., the program is designed, by the awarding of scholarships for further study of library procedures or other relevant subjects, to increase the competence of library personnel, improve the services of the libraries, lead to a greater recognition of qualified library personnel and, in general, raise the level of selection and training of personnel for seminary libraries. In 1959, the Lilly Endowment, Inc. agreed to support the project further by making an additional grant of \$27,000 to be paid in annual installments of \$9,000 for three more years. The benefits of this program will have a continuing effect upon the problems of training theological librarians for their professional and scholarly responsibilities.

In general, it may be said that the founding and rapid growth of the A.T.L.A. reflects the wide interest of the modern Protestant theological seminaries in the development of libraries as important resources for teaching and research. The A.T.L.A. has aroused wide concern for the strengthening of library resources and for the employment of more adequate staffs, and has laid stress upon subject knowledge for librarians. Very successful in the early stages of its program, it has still much more important work ahead of it. More attention to obtaining higher salaries and better status for all professional members of library staffs, the formulation of more adequate standards for theological libraries, consideration of the needs and weaknesses of the larger seminary libraries, the discovery of more effective means of using the library in theological structure, the procurement of stronger financial support, the recruiting of young librarians, and procedures for giving new employees adequate training—these are some of the concerns which A.T.L.A. shares with the whole library world. The present executive secretary of A.T.L.A. is Frederick L. Chenery, 606 Rathervue Place, Austin 5, Texas. Past presidents of the Association are: L. R. Elliott 1947-49; Jannette E. Newhall 1949-51; Raymond P. Morris 1951-53; Henry M. Brimm 1953-54; Robert F. Beach 1954-56; Helen B. Uhrich 1956-57; Calvin Schmitt 1957-58; Dechard

Turner, Jr. 1958-59; Mrs. Pamela Quiers 1959-60; and Kenneth S. Gapp, 1960-61.

The annual conferences have been held at Louisville, Kentucky (1947); Dayton, Ohio (1948); Chicago, Illinois (1949); Columbus, Ohio (1950); Rochester, New York (1951); Louisville, Kentucky (1952); Evanston, Illinois (1953); Chicago, Illinois (1954); New York, New York (1955); Berkeley, California (1956); Fort Worth, Texas (1957); Boston, Massachusetts (1958); Toronto, Canada (1959); and St. Paul, Minnesota (1960).

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